

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN EMPOWERING IRRIGATORS' ASSOCIATIONS IN BUKIDNON: AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND PLANNED CHANGE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the vital role of leadership in empowering Irrigators' Association in the province of Bukidnon, with focus on agricultural extension and planned change as key drivers of rural development. Effective leadership is crucial in fostering collaboration, enhancing organizational capacity and promoting the adoption of innovative farming technologies. Through qualitative collection from selected IAs, this research examines how leadership styles, decision-making process and participatory governance influence members engagement, sustainability of irrigation system and agricultural productivity.

The study also highlights the integration of agricultural extension services in building the technical knowledge and adaptive capacities of IA leaders and leadership significantly contributes to successful project implementation, conflict resolution and long-term organizational growth. The paper concludes by offering recommendations for strengthening leadership development programs and extension strategies to accelerate planned change and contribute to the overall progress of rural farming communities in the province.

Keyword: N/A

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a key factor in the success and sustainability of Irrigators Associations particularly in Bukidnon, where irrigation systems play a vital role in boosting agricultural productivity and ensuring food security. Irrigators Association serves as a grassroot organizations responsible for the equitable distribution of irrigation water, system maintenance and the mobilization of farmers toward shared agricultural goals. However, the capacity of these associations to fulfill their mandates is highly dependent on the quality of leadership within the organization. Strong, participatory and visionary leadership enables IAs to overcome operational challenges, manage conflicts and motivate member toward collective action and long-term development.

The framework of this study is grounded in agricultural extension and planned change theories. Agricultural extension provides a platform for continuous learning, capacity building, and technology transfer to farmers and their organizations. Planned change theory, on the

other hand, emphasizes the deliberate and structured process of introducing innovations, behavioral changes, and new management practices that promote organizational growth and sustainability. The synergy of leadership, extension services, and planned change becomes crucial in transforming IAs from simple water-user groups into empowered rural institutions capable of driving agricultural and community development.

The rationale for this study stems from the pressing need to strengthen the leadership capacities of IAs in Bukidnon, given the increasing demand for sustainable agriculture, climate resilience, and efficient water resource management. Despite the presence of government programs and interventions, some IAs remain constrained by weak leadership, low member participation, and difficulty in implementing planned changes. By understanding the role of leadership in empowering IAs, this study aims to contribute to improving extension strategies and leadership development programs that will

enhance the capacity of IAs to address local challenges and sustain rural development efforts.

2. OBJECTIVE IF THE STUDY

1. To determine the leadership style of Irrigators' Association in Bukidnon;
2. To analyze the role of leadership in empowering Irrigators' Association in Bukidnon;
3. To assess how agricultural extensions interventions can be tailored to build the leadership capacity of IAs;
4. To determine the challenges and opportunities encounter by the leaders in implementing change; and
5. To recommend leadership development strategies and extension interventions that will empower Irrigators Association and contribute rural development in the province of Bukidnon.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study will use a qualitative method to collect the data from the participants and will utilize a survey questionnaire to facilitate the gathering of primary information from the participants. The questionnaire will be administered personally by the researchers through a face-to-face interview.

3.2. Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in nine (9) irrigators association under Pulangui River Irrigation System- North Main Canal located in the Basakan Disctrict of Malaybalay City, Bukidnon. Namely, the Calawag New San Roque IA, Kalawag Apo Macote Sto. Nino IA at Apo Macote, Cabugon IA at Sto. Nino, San Martin North Main Canal IA at San Martin, Sinanglanan National IA at Sinanalang, Purais- Pajo IA, Lower Simaya IA, Mansagkoy Lagis Binalbagan IA at Simaya and Nabag-o North

Main Canal IA located at Nabag-o, Valencia City, Bukidnon.

3.3. Respondents and Sampling Procedure

The respondents were the IA Officers and Staff of above-mentioned irrigators associations. They are ideal IA officers that provides the data needed by the researchers in conducting the study.

3.4. Data Gathering Techniques

A semi-structured questionnaire was employed to collect primary data via guided interviews and questions. This questionnaire was designed in alignment with the study's objectives. Composed in English and it was translated into Cebuano during the interviews.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study on the role of leadership in empowering irrigators' association in Bukidnon.

4.1. Personal profile

Table 1 presents the profile of the participants. Data revealed that one-third (33%) of the participants fell in the age group 61-70. The oldest was 80 years old and the youngest was 30 years old, with a mean age of 52 years. This result indicates that irrigators association leaders and members are composed of middle-aged individuals which implies that the irrigators are experienced and have deep-rooted knowledge in regards with farming and irrigation management. This result is aligned with the study of Yohannes et. al., (2017), their study indicated that majority of the irrigators aged over 50 years old means they have long-standing practices and deep knowledge in irrigations management.

TABLE 1. Profile of the participants

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
71-80	1	3
61-70	10	33
51-60	5	17
41-50	8	27
31-40	5	17
20-30	1	3
TOTAL	30	100
Mean	52 years old	

SEX			
	Male	22	73
	Female	8	27
	TOTAL	30	100
MARITAL STATUS			
	Married	29	97
	Widow/ Widower	1	3
	TOTAL	30	100
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT			
	Elementary level	5	17
	Elementary graduate	8	27
	High school level	7	23
	College level	5	16
	College graduate	2	7
	High school graduate	3	10
YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE ASSOCIATION			
	1-5years	12	40
	6-10 years	3	10
	10-15 years	15	50
	TOTAL	30	100
	Mean	6 years	

Furthermore, the data indicates that the participants of the study is dominated by male with less than three-fourths (73%) which indicated that leadership and decision making within irrigators association are primarily in men. Most men can work on developing emotional intelligence specifically their empathy which is crucial for trusting and strong relationship with their teams (Oliver et. al., 2024). Also, majority (97%) of the irrigators are married which means the participants has a strong sense of responsibility and commitment in the success of their farms and communities. The educational profile of the participants indicated that over one-fourth (23%) are elementary graduates while less than one-tenth (2%) attained tertiary degree. This result suggests that limited formal education may affect the capacity of the participants to fully engage in administrative or leadership functions within irrigator 'association. Lastly, the data revealed that one-half (50%) of irrigators have 10-15 years of membership. The highest years of membership is 15 years, while the lowest is 1 year with the mean of 6 years. Which indicates irrigators are well experienced and gained enough knowledge that can help them more engage in the association.

The role of leadership practices in empowering Irrigators' Associations

Table 2 shows the leadership practices in empowering irrigators association. The results showed an overall mean of 3.92 which means leaders often practiced good leadership and empower members to actively participate in the associations. In, addition, results show diverse leadership practices of AI which indicated that in IA they practiced several leadership style in leading the members that may lead to empowerment, engagement, and satisfaction. In particular, leaders in Irrigators' association maintained fairness and avoid favoritism in decision-making (5.00); leaders in Irrigators' association involve members in associations' decision making (4.90); leaders in AI gave mentoring and trained future AI leaders (4.83); and leaders in IA are strict and enforced rules without members' input (4.70). the results suggests that leaders of irrigators' associations generally showed effective leadership, with a strong tendency to empower and offer a dynamic leadership environment to balance and ensure consistent and sustainable organization development. The study of Alam et. al., (2012) highlights that the longer experience with greater satisfaction of irrigators is more likely to have an active participation in management.

Table 2. Leadership practices in empowering Irrigators' Associations

INDICATOR	WEIGHTED MEAN	DESCRIPTIVE RATING
The IA leaders involved members in decision-making.	4.90	Always
Leaders clearly communicated goals and responsibilities.	3.80	Often
Leaders listened and responded to members' concerns	4.50	Often
Leaders recognized and appreciated member contributions.	4.27	Often
Leaders are strict and enforced rules without member input.	4.70	Always
Leaders encourage innovation and new ideas.	4.13	Often
Leaders tend to make decisions alone.	3.10	Sometimes
Leaders promote transparency in IA operations and finances.	4.13	Often
Leaders maintain fairness and avoid favoritism in decision-making.	5.00	Always
Leader's mentor and train future IA leaders.	4.83	Always
Overall Mean	3.92	Often

LEGEND:

4.51-5.00 Always

3.51-4.50 Often

2.51-3.50 Sometimes

1.51-2.50 Rarely

1.00-1.50 Never

Additionally, table 3 shows the roles of leadership practices in empowering AI. The result showed overall mean of 4.67 which means that AI leadership are seen to promote confidence, collaborations, and a sense of ownership among members. In particular, AI leaders provide opportunities for members to lead projects (5.00);

members feel they have a voice in AI activities (5.00); Leadership contributes to the overall success of the IA (5.00); and Leadership encourages collaboration and teamwork among members. This implies that Irrigators Association is highly effective in fostering members' collaborations, empowerment, and share ownership, that can contribute to the success and active engagement within the AI. This corresponds to the study of Mazzetti and Schaufeli, (2022) that teams with a leader that are inspiring, connecting, strengthening, and connecting can draw upon more team resources (i.e., performance feedback, trust in management, communication, and participation in decision-making). Also, these leaders formulate a members' climate that fosters employee growth and development.

Table 3. Role of leadership practices in empowering Irrigators' Associations

INDICATORS	WEIGHTED MEAN	DESCRIPTIVE RATING
Leadership practices in the IA build member confidence.	4.83	Strongly agree
IA leaders provide opportunities for members to lead projects.	5.00	Strongly agree
Members are more active because of leadership encouragement	3.13	Neutral
Leadership helps members understand their roles and responsibilities.	4.87	Strongly Agree
Members feel they have a voice in IA activities.	5.00	Strongly Agree
Leadership contributes to the overall success of the IA.	5.00	Strongly Agree
Leadership encourages collaboration and teamwork among members.	5.00	Strongly Agree
Leadership inspires a sense of ownership and responsibility among members.	4.53	Strongly Agree

Overall mean	4.67	Strongly Agree
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LEGEND:

4.51-5.00 Strongly Agree

3.51-4.50 Agree

2.51-3.50 Neutral

1.51-2.50 Disagree

1.00-1.50 Strongly Disagree

Agricultural extension interventions in building leadership capacity of AIs

Table 4 presents the distribution of participants according to leadership training attended. Findings showed that majority (90%) of the participants attended leadership training particularly in Basic Development Leadership Course and system management workshop. This implies a strong foundation of formal leadership, knowledge and skills among members of the associations. The study of Haiou et al., (2025) concluded that leadership development programs affected the competences and performance of leaders such as enhanced decision-making abilities and overall institutional effectiveness.

Table 4. Distribution of participants according to leadership training attended

Title of Training	Percentage
Basic Development Leadership Course	90
Financial Management System	73
System Management Workshop	90
Policy Formulation	30
Gender-Based Training	30

Figure 1 shows the leadership training effectiveness according to participants. The data reveals that most (85%) of the participants agrees that the leadership training they had attended are effective in building capacity and empowerment. However, slightly one-eight (13%) of the participants has unfavorable attitude towards leadership training they had attended. This implies that leadership training is largely effective. This suggest that training programs implemented within their association are meeting their goals and positively influencing leadership practices with the association. Leadership workshops are effective and impactful at the team, by helping them gains shared mental model and engage in share decision-making. Additionally, leadership training became an opportunity for the members to learn skills and build a strong relationship with one another (Willgerodt et al., 2020).

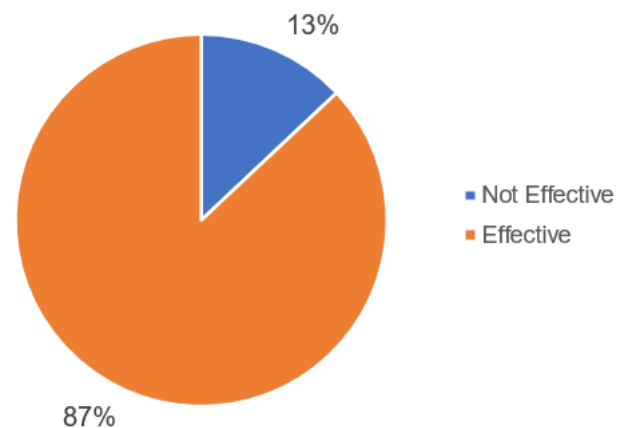


Figure 1. Leadership training effectiveness

Table 5 shows the distribution of participants according to the extension support that the participants believe in strengthening Irrigators Association leadership. The data reveals that the participants chose regular leadership seminars, mentorship or coaching, and access to digital learning platforms as their preferred extension supports to strengthen Irrigators' associations leadership. This suggest that participants valued

structured and formal training sessions, recognized the benefits of personalized guidance, and openness to modern, flexible settings. Sengupta (2021) emphasizes that digital learning offers scalability and flexibility and also mentorship bring personalized support necessary for effective knowledge application. By combining these strategies, it will lead to more comprehensive and impactful leadership development.

Table 5. Preferred extension support that strengthens AI leadership

Extension support	Frequency	Rank
Regular leadership seminars	13	1
Mentorship or coaching	10	2
Peer learning with other IAs	1	5
Resource materials (manuals, toolkits)	2	4
Access to digital learning platforms	4	3

Challenges faced by the Irrigators' association

Table 6 revealed the challenges faced by the irrigators' association. As reflected in the data the participants faced challenges on: financial constraints and lack of members participation. This means that limited funding significantly affects leadership development and IAs challenge in mobilizing and engaging members in the associations. This suggests a strong need for financial support from external stakeholders and encourage active participation of members. According to Swanson (2019) stakeholder engagement is vital for financial sustainability and diversifying funding resources can lessen organizations' financial vulnerabilities. Ewuru (2024) added that members engagement is important in the associations because if members are disengaged, they won't renew their membership. Active participation within association ensures associations' hits its target and fulfils its mission.

Table 6. Challenges faced by the AI

Challenges	Frequency	Rank
Member participation	25	2
Resistance to change	10	3
Lack of training	3	4
Financial constraints	26	1

*Multiple response

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results gathered, it was concluded that the leadership style among IA Leaders of nine (9) irrigators associations in Pulangui River Irrigation System- North Main Canal is participative and democratic. This approach fosters collaboration, transparency and shared responsibilities among IA members contributing to the effective operation of irrigation systems and management of the associations. Leadership style plays a vital role in empowering the associations, the leaders functioning not only as administrator but also a motivator and a facilitator as well.

The study also found out that while agricultural extension interventions are present, they are not always tailored to the specific leadership development needs of IA leaders. There is also a significant opportunity to enhance these interventions by integrating leadership training with technical support. Furthermore, IA leaders faced several challenges, including financial constraints and members participation. Despite these obstacles, there are opportunities to strengthen leadership through strong partnership and collaboration with local government units and agricultural institutions that can offer much needed resources and training.

It is recommended that structured and continuous leadership development programs be implemented to enhance the leadership capacity of IA officers and staff. Promoting inclusive participation among members can enhance grassroots leadership and foster stronger sense of ownership within the association. These will not only empower the Irrigators' Association but also contribute significantly to rural development in the province of Bukidnon.

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